
Doctor Who, New Dimensions and the Inner World: A Reciprocal Review

Two significant additions to Doctor Who's academic 'canon' were published recently and, continuing our interest in new ways of approaching the review format, here we ask two authors, Iain MacRury and Matt Hills, to appraise each others' texts.

Iain MacRury, I. and Rustin, M. (2013) *The Inner World of Doctor Who* London: Karnac Books.

This book, part of the 'Psychoanalysis and Popular Culture' series, does two things that are relatively unusual within the dimensions of *Doctor Who* scholarship. Firstly, it relates psychoanalytic thinking to the programme, and secondly it focuses on a selected range of texts, which, though they all hail from the BBC Wales' version of the show, are not otherwise structured by production eras. Instead, case study texts are chosen on the basis of the authors' emotional and mindful responses to them.

MacRury and Rustin deliberately set out to neglect many things that have preoccupied recent media/cultural studies, e.g. the productivity of fan audiences or the proliferation of transmedia and promotional paratexts. Perhaps these might constitute the 'outer worlds' of *Doctor Who*, markers of its industrial and cultural contexts. By contrast, this book seeks to return to traditional modes of textual study. It's a decision that leads to some characteristic strengths and occasional weaknesses.

On the plus side, there are many smart observations here which provoke new ways of seeing 'nu Who'. The Daleks, for example, have been thought about previously as symbolic of Nazism, as representing rage-filled children's tantrums, or even as resembling BBC cameras from the 1960s. Here they are depicted as a kind of anti-TARDIS, with their claustrophobic xenophobia making them 'smaller on the inside' (p.15), and thus a fitting contrast to the Doctor. Meanwhile, the Doctor himself is discussed as occupying a kind of thinker-therapist role in relation to many of his companions, thereby dramatising values of psychotherapy and self-understanding.

MacRury and Rustin stress *Doctor Who*'s provision of 'good stories, stories that can touch and provoke complex feelings' (p. xxv). Consequently, chapters where Michael Rustin is the lead author focus on *Father's Day*, *The Parting of the Ways*, *The Empty Child* and *The Doctor Dances*, *The Girl in the Fireplace*, *Vincent and the Doctor*, *Blink*, and *The Angels Take Manhattan*. In turn, Iain MacRury's contributions as 'principal author' are chapters tackling

The Shakespeare Code, The Unicorn and the Wasp, The Beast Below, The Lodger, The Doctor's Wife and Closing Time. Opening and closing chapters take a more synthetic, overarching stance rather than focusing on specific episodes, and the one chapter which otherwise stands out by virtue of adopting a variant approach is Chapter 12, 'The Story of Amelia Pond'.

However, this intensive scrutiny, where the texts of *Doctor Who* become almost akin to an analysand requiring free-floating attention, can create a few difficulties. Zeroing in on specific episodes potentially creates blind spots or gaps: for instance, it is striking that only one Russell T. Davies-authored episode is named as a chapter's focal point, whilst four Gareth Roberts-penned tales are discussed in this detailed manner. One might suggest that Roberts adopts a sentimentalism that's especially rewarding for this mode of study (as well as contributing two 'celebrity historicals' that attract attention), but the relative absence of analysis of Davies's storytelling seems a little perverse. Likewise, I can't help but ponder whether the story arc of Donna Noble (Catherine Tate) might have repaid more detailed analysis, though the authors do concede that 'we have not given Donna as much attention as we have to some of the other characters who have travelled with the Doctor' (p.148). I also feel that Clara Oswald may have called for a stronger critical reading: to what extent is she understandable as a character with a projected inner life, and to what extent does Clara problematically figure as a showrunner's cipher? By assuming that characters will always be responded to as realist 'entities' – i.e. as if they are real people with emotional lives and psychical depth/interiority – *The Inner World of Doctor Who* seems to partly downplay what cognitivists would call 'A-emotions' (or 'artefact emotions') oriented instead towards the constructedness of stories, arcs, finales and reveals.

Emphasising 'good stories' that engage with audience emotions leads the book to dwell on narratives of father-daughter relationships (Chapter 3), romance (Chapter 4), death and loss (Chapter 5), what it might mean to be 'ordinary' (Chapter 9), and the saying of goodbyes (Chapter 11): this marginalises ways in which (fan) audiences might be disappointed, dismayed or even angered by some of the narrative choices made across 'nu Who'. And the focus on readings produced by two attentive critics means that this study necessarily lacks any fleshed-out, empirical notion of how wider audiences might have responded to the series: were the episodes selected here received more generally as 'stand-out' or as especially provocative/emotive entries in the franchise? There is little or no methodological space for episode selections to be corroborated in any way – we simply have to take it on trust that these are particularly productive pathways into *Doctor Who*. Perhaps a chapter on regeneration and the Doctor's capacity to change (looking at what fans call 'regeneration stories', as well as introductory tales for each new Doctor) would

have been equally useful in relation to narratives of loss and hopefulness – yet *The End of Time* has only one mention in the book's index, and its brief recollection refers to 'William Mott' (p.290 and 304) when *The Inner World of Doctor Who* presumably means the character of Wilfred Mott played by Bernard Cribbins. This sort of misstep leaves the reader with a sense that outside the close readings of episodes, knowledge of the series is not always as robust as it might be. In an area of Media Studies where scholar-fandom or aca-fandom has increasingly become the norm, approaches to popular cultural texts written by experts who are nevertheless not detail-oriented fans risks offending some fan readers (who presumably constitute part of the crossover market for this title).

Making perceptive use of object-relations theory without getting bogged down in detailed theoretical exegesis, *The Inner World of Doctor Who* is at its best when wearing its psychoanalytic approach fairly lightly and yet illuminating the texts of *Doctor Who* in unexpected ways. The contrast between 'history' and 'moratorium' explored in the closing chapter is especially productive (though I would have welcomed a little more on p.299 on how 'potential time' relates to the Winnicottian concept of potential space). And I also found that analyses of *The Beast Below* and *The Doctor's Wife* caused me to think afresh about the series, here in terms of the gift economy (p.172) and containment (p.214). Indeed, given that *The Beast Below* has been discussed by writer Steven Moffat as one of his weaker scripts – and received by fandom as a less successful episode – one of the benefits brought about by working outside (scholar-)fandom is that episodes which might otherwise be neglected are instead treated with respect and care. In short, *The Inner World of Doctor Who* is a welcome addition to scholarship surrounding the series; its 'trad' textual analyses will no doubt be especially useful when read in conjunction with other work on Who's (fan) audiences, paratexts, branding, and transmedia extensions. As an argument for the value of relating object relations psychoanalysis to popular culture, it is both intellectually exciting and exemplary.

Reviewer – Matt Hills – Aberystwyth University

***New Dimensions of Doctor Who: Adventures in Space, Time and Television.* London: I B Tauris. Hills, M. (ed) (2013)**

In the editorial introduction to *New Dimensions of Doctor Who: Adventures in Space, Time and Television*, Matt Hills considers a 'glut' of recent books exploring Doctor Who. Such abundant productivity has been, as he suggests, market- and anniversary-led. November 23 2013 saw the 50th anniversary episode aired and *Doctor Who* is enjoying unprecedented global popularity.

This edited collection, *New Dimensions of Doctor Who* is, naturally, a part of the 'glut' identified by Hills and represents amongst the most recent outcomes of an impressive investment in the crossover fan-academic interest in *Doctor Who* by publishers I B Tauris. Other titles in the I B Tauris series include *Who is Who?* (Decker, 2013), *Doctor Who – The Eleventh Hour* (O'Day, 2013), *Inside the Tardis* (Chapman, 2006/2013), *Love and Monsters* (Booy, 2012), *TARDISbound* (Britton, 2011), *The Doctor's Monsters* (Sleight, 2012) and *Triumph of a Time Lord* (Hills, 2010). Indeed, *New Dimensions of Doctor Who* brings some of these authors and editors together in the space of this latest title – jokingly referred to as being akin to a 'multi-Doctor' episode (2013: 5), a rare and special event in the lifecycle of the long running show.

Nevertheless the collection remains focused and distinctive amongst the crowd. It is true to its title. Each of its eleven substantive chapters opens up a particular new dimension of *Doctor Who* – it is split into well-conceived sections considering 'the New Doctor Who', 'New Television and Media' and 'New Spaces and Times'. The essays are all informative; the contributors well versed in the kinds of integrative detail that fan-academics are able to bring to their objects of analysis. As a result the book will equip its readers with means to think more about constitutive component elements of *Doctor Who*, ingredients through which the Doctor has been produced and re-produced (on screen and as 'brand'), notably, costume and monster design, music, narrative styles and pace, merchandising and para-texts fostering audience nostalgia, anniversaries and various engagements (hyped and non-hyped) by audiences. These are amongst the 'new' perspectives opened up by the chapters.

We are, then, taken some way beyond the stories and the Doctor. Highlighting aspects that might be thought of a peripheral or adjunct to the episodes aired on television, instead, the chapters place specialist aspects front and centre. For instance David Butler offers a critical analysis of Murray Gold's widely celebrated musical contributions to the show – wondering whether or not a sonic trick was missed as producers (via Gold) largely eschewed opportunities to experiment with non-western and atonal musical modes, deferring to orthodox western-sounding orchestrations in the acoustic life of the new *Doctor Who* series (and in rendering its complex discourse of 'otherness'). Butler suggests potential multi-cultural alternatives and counter-exemplars, while also connecting the musical policy to the dramatic tenor of a revised *Doctor Who* committed to emotive dramatisations.

Piers Britton reminds us of new monsters and costuming and explores the studied way in which these have been talked about in the reflective meta-discourses of the show. Ostensibly offering reflections on material cultures of production, the essay also offers insights into dynamics of nostalgia and branding, pre-empting later chapters from Hills,

Johnson and Garner.

The dynamics of Britton's analysis of the interplay of old and new is echoed, too, in Brooker's reference to T.S. Eliot's famous essay on *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Brooker uses Eliot's ideas about dialogical renewal (across generations) to help situate the intersections emerging when new writers (Brooker is talking about Neil Gaiman) and established narrative cosmologies such as *Doctor Who*'s, come together. Brooker's neatly structured examination provides a fascinating perspective on both critical reading and on creative-writing processes. Focusing on Gaiman's *Doctor's Wife* episode, he charts some of the complex and distributed conjunctions across inter-textual and personal histories, histories that make up, and that are made up within the episode itself.

Bonnie Green and Chris Wilmott's discussion of the mythic Cybermen and the 'proximity' of the post-human is suitably chilling. It ends with a provocative suggestion that readers might seek to stand 'against the grain' of *Doctor Who*'s preferred gothic meanings (*Doctor Who* privileges human over various post-human avatars). This playful futurology conveys a thought that some may not be quite ready enough to entertain as fully as the chapter seems to recommend they should.

Catherine Johnson provides overview and context for a broader strand within the book – the mobilisation of the idea of a 'brand' in thinking about *Doctor Who*. One wonders to what extent the creative flourishing (2005–13) achieved by Russell T. Davies, Stephen Moffat, and by numerous other creative contributors to the show, was supported by any ideas about 'branding' as such? Nevertheless the contribution made by branding to creative management of continuity and canon is well explained, and anticipates some interesting details about the variations in the ways the BBC managed anniversaries in Hill's later chapter. The paradoxical position of the BBC as public service and private commercial producer is framed clearly.

Andrew O'Day's discussion of 'time and pace' in the structuring of episodes and season narratives endeavours to unpack some the aesthetic-affective consequences of the ways that new *Doctor Who* episodes are storied and relayed within its newer formats. O'Day spells out some of the dramatic consequences entailed to moving from series formats to stand alone episodes and offers a useful account of the role and emergence of the 'story arc'. The essay convincingly captures the sources of some of the show's specific dramatic qualities.

Exploring yet more radical disturbances to narrative form Elizabeth Evans provides an insight into the considerable efforts made to mobilise *Doctor Who* in the service of educational aims. An account of 'gamification' of *Doctor Who* prefaces a detailed description of the intersection of a *Doctor Who* 'story', an educational mission and a history lesson

based on the gun powder plot and Guy Fawkes. We see further reflections on the BBC's public service remit around education, but also supporting creative technical development and stimulating innovation.

Further exploring new media environments, Rebecca Williams provides analysis of tweets. An examination of some of producer Stephen Moffat's tweets affords an occasion to ruminate more broadly on the new timing and spacing of fan-producer relations in the Twitter-verse. The places and spaces of *Doctor Who* fans are not, of course, restricted to screen cultures, television and Twitter. The pressing compulsion to return, as it were, to the primal scenes of production and creation draw some fans to the 'new' geographic source of *Doctor Who* (not to mention *Torchwood*).

And Mellissa Beattie offers useful analytic work on place. Beattie tells the story of the 'Doctor Who Experience' making us conscious of the place of the *Doctor Who* operation and reputation in the production of new spaces and new narratives in the re-formation of Cardiff Bay. It is a familiar tale of post-industrial regeneration. Unlike the fictive regenerations that at once preserve and renew the Time Lord's lives, the narrative push of urban change can, often, be to merely efface and occlude aspects of the past – history replaced by myth.

Ross Garner picks up a theme also referred to by O'Day and by Hills, that of mourning. This is a term that looms large in our own study of *Doctor Who*, *The Inner World of Doctor Who* (MacRury & Rustin, 2013), but from a more psychosocial perspective. Garner examines the episode *School Reunion*, which brought an 'old *Who*' companion (Sarah Jane Smith) back into the frame of a 'new *Who*' episode, as well as fans' reactions to the sad death of the actress Elisabeth Sladen (who played Sarah Jane Smith). Garner opens up the complex question of the role of television in the marking of time – via emotion and nostalgia. The intersection of mythology and history (as in Brooker's discussion of *The Doctor's Wife*) is equally at play in Garner's discussion, and we are minded that *School Reunion* might be glossed by another 1970s televisual refrain: 'What became of the people we used to be?' Garner concludes with some useful thoughts on narrative and historicity – challenging more pessimistic critiques positing a reified eternal presentism.

Appropriately, Hills ends with further ruminations on time. His concluding chapter considers the topical but largely neglected notion of televisual anniversaries and outlines a kind of historiographical account of the TV anniversary, linking the conduct and experience of anniversaries to a neat set of historical categories linked to the evolution of TV. We now live in an age of 'hype'. Hills is alert to the emotive and mournful nature of televisual history and connects this sensitively to detailed historical research and recollection.

Throughout the book there is a conscious effort to relay analytic points in the context of references to broader theoretical terminologies and approaches. Staple concepts and media theorists – Jameson, Foucault, Barthes, Todorov, intertextuality, narrative theory, affect theory and postmodernism – get regular, reflexive, airing. This combination of theory and detailed investigation of aspects of *Doctor Who* enables the varied chapters to bring a subtilising and thoughtful framing of the show (and its adjunct parts). The consumption and circulation of *Doctor Who* are given consideration, highlighted in descriptions of emergent and established branding practices and their infrastructures – looking inside BBC World and the ‘*Doctor Who* Experience’, but also via some direct and indirect sampling of fans’ discussions and discourses – notably on Twitter.

The collection does not assert a specific position or argue for a particular line of thought. There is no index, though the structure invites browsing. The chapters are typically not critical of *Doctor Who*, each contributor instead presenting a case for more detailed consideration and theorisation of its particular topic, and seeking to demonstrate the contributions that academic perspectives might bring to the ways producers and consumers conceive and enjoy the show.

Nevertheless there are emergent themes across the chapters. The changing places for experiencing and thinking about *Doctor Who*, between real and virtual, between present and past perspectives, between mourning, melancholia and obsession. The book often picks up on the movements and paradoxes between BBC in its guises as commercial player and public institution, and highlights connection to educational and social media based technologies.

Hills’s editorial is framed, as a question: ‘*Doctor Who* studies?’ This book, alongside the range of other recently published texts offers up *Doctor Who* as a stable locus for the analysis and exploration of cultural and social change – as well as a back door source for insights into the evolution of television. There is material enough for an array of ‘studies’ beyond and within media and television. The book is likely to be of interest to the growing audience of fan scholars seeking to connect a lively theoretical set of critical agendas to a fertile and multiple object-brand (*Doctor Who*). There is a need for the containing, narrative intelligibility offered by a show like *Doctor Who*. Its presence across most of the past 50 years clearly stands as a point of orientation, attraction, articulation and thought; as something, somewhere to look forward to and to return to for a widening array of fans, scholars, actors, producers, directors and writers: an object of shared public culture surviving framing and re-framing. Long may it continue!

- Sleight, G. (2012). *The Doctor's Monsters: Meanings of the Monstrous in Doctor Who*. London: IB Tauris.
- Booy, M. (2012). *Love and Monsters: The Doctor Who Experience, 1979 to the Present*. London: IB Tauris.
- Chapman, J. (2006). *Inside the Tardis: the worlds of Doctor Who*. London: IB Tauris.
- Sleight, G. (2012). *The Doctor's Monsters: Meanings of the Monstrous in Doctor Who*. London: IB Tauris.
- Hills, M. (2010). *Triumph of a time lord: Regenerating Doctor Who in the twenty-first century*. London: IB Tauris.
- Britton, P.D. (2011). *TARDISbound: Navigating the Universes of Doctor Who*. London: IB Tauris.
- Decker, K.S. (2013). *Who is Who?* London: IB Tauris.
- MacRury, I. & Rustin M. (2013). *The Inner World of Doctor Who*. London: Karnac.
- Reviewer – Iain MacRury – Bournemouth University

Hall, S. Evans, J. and Nixon, S. (1997; 2013) (eds) *Representation* (2nd edition). London: Sage. ISBN 978-1-84920-563-4



Laughey's Canon

Editor's note: This review is part of our series in which a current media teacher re-examines a 'classic' text in honour of MERJ editorial board member Dan Laughey and his provocative 'Back to Basics' article in MERJ 2:2.

Given relativist tendencies, I can only assume that Stuart Hall's *Representation* is worthy of inclusion in Laughey's Canon. Certainly, Hall is a theorist usually included in media theory halls of fame. In the same year as the publication of this second edition (2013), John Akomfrah's semi-biopic *The Stuart Hall Project* (BFI) was released to significant critical reception and Birmingham University announced Hall's appearance 'in conversation' at a conference to re-appraise the legacy of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, fifty years on.

This is a review of three parts. First, a comment on the (perhaps obvious) 'use value' of *Representation* for teaching media; second, thinking about the film also, an attempt at

something towards a brief mythology of Stuart Hall; and third, suggestions for working with both together, using the film as a site for students to deconstruct Hall 'from within' – to get inside myth, the Eiffel Tower escape.

The book is, of course, an edited collection and something of a 'greatest hits' of representational theory, as opposed to a sole-authored theoretical contribution. The re-issue isn't particularly significant since the readings discussed at length and applied for student activities are more in the 'classical' vein than contemporary re-imaginings – spectatorship and subjectivism, poetics and politics, the subject in / of representation, difference and power, the spectacle of the other and mythology. Hall's introduction is, since we're in canonical mode, simply 'masterful' and his central premise – that meaning is not truth but 'effective exchange' between speakers using a medium (language) is the key idea we can offer our students as a way in to more complex analyses of discourse, myth, signification. As it generally takes my students longer – or they find it harder – to 'get' representation than I expect, perhaps because I've been working with the concept one way or another for almost thirty years and time blurs the pedagogic gaze, this clear starting point is helpful.

How to use the book? My suggestion is to start out with Tony Benn's five questions to ask of the powerful, then the first fifteen minutes or so of Zizek's *Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), where he uses John Carpenter's *They Live* (1998) to exemplify interpellation – 'put the glasses on', we can say to our students at any time we want them to 'do ideology' from this point. Next, the aforementioned gateway to representational theory provided in Hall's introduction and then a comparison of Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1992) with its reworking for our times in *Massive Attack v Adam Curtis* (2013).

But what does *The Stuart Hall Project* do / add, and what / how does it complicate?

The film is a fascinating, sometimes poetic, non-linear narrative of Hall's life and work in the context of Britain as a more or less accommodating multi-cultural landscape. The director sets out to cover 'the multiple lives of a multicultural subject', with regard to Hall, but this could equally be applied to Birmingham, where his work was fostered with the most impact, and to England more broadly.

Project is an assemblage of existing footage, anchored entirely with the music of Miles Davis, which provides one of many rich opportunities for students to 'do mythology' on the text. It's fascinating, but does little to challenge or extend the informed viewer's 'preferred reading' of the person or his work. Despite itself, and apart from any intentions, it's hard not to reflect on how the film's aesthetics and the weight given to Hall as himself a signifier set up some interesting and perhaps ironic questions – when The Guardian's Peter Bradshaw muses that the film 'has an idealism and seriousness that people might not

immediately associate with the subject Hall pioneered, Cultural Studies', this renders the CCCS project in its assumed metric scales of epistemological 'meat' at best incomplete, at worst a failure – certainly there is no antidote here to the (in)discipline's self-confinement to academic margins, as lamented by Graeme Turner and others. Ironic, then, that Hall's iconic status serves to reinforce such hierarchies, even fetishising the trappings of cultural power – the man as a project, no less? The film works through the gaze of Hall, upon the changing culture of Britain. Hall, at the same time, becomes profoundly 'other', exotic, mythical, a quintessential signifier.

Either way, substantial textual fodder for students to work with. I'd suggest applying the section on poetic, performative post-documentary (see page 97) to *The Stuart Hall Project*; comparing the discussion of Mary Douglas and disturbances to the cultural order (see page 226) when things turn up in the wrong category to the question of Stuart Hall in the canon, with 'legacy'. The semiotic activity on page 25 appears rather 'pedestrian' (no play on the classic traffic light exemplar intended) – students are to deconstruct an advert for Panzani pasta and related products. So an obvious extension would be to turn the exercise on the book's cover – how is myth (re)constructed here, and why is 'Stuart Hall' bigger than the co-editors?

All work with all things canonical must be an unraveling rather than mere 'appreciation' – how does the text come to mean, through secondary encoding, how does it signify through translation in a cultural circuit. I'm suggesting here a kind of rich 'double loop' is at play, which adds to what we can do with *Representation* and how we can think about Stuart Hall.

Reviewer – Julian McDougall

***Children, Film and Literacy* by Becky Parry London: Palgrave Macmillan ISBN: 978-1-137-29432-6**

This is an engaging read for media educators and, as Jackie Marsh points out in the foreword, it is long overdue.

Many claims are made to the value of studying media for young people. But here Parry sets out on a very particular path to argue for the value of bringing children's film in particular into the wider development of understanding of narrative, to make the experience of watching/making children's films an integral part of reading and writing, indeed of literacy itself.

The first three chapters explicitly focus on role of children's film in children's lives.

Parry takes on board all of the arguments made against children's films: arguments that accuse children's films of erring on the side of *happy endings* (Disney's crime), or films that refuse the difficulties in a complex narrative from a book and opt for a happy ending instead. And she acknowledges criticisms about a lack of diversification in children's narratives both at a text level and very obviously in the lack of opportunity for diverse points of view from those employed in the industry. In spite of all these, sometimes legitimate, critiques of children's films, she still argues that '*the space created by children's films are open, complex and rich, rather than entirely closed and didactic*' (2013: 31). Thus by Chapter Four, the objective of her research is clarified. She sets out to answer a crucial question of how children learn about narrative through their engagement with children's films. She does this through a small-scale piece of qualitative research with 9-10 year olds exploring the processes involved in reading films and the way that understanding of moving image narrative could impact on understanding of narrative in print.

What much of the book is about comes from data gathered, presented and analysed from a small-scale qualitative enquiry based in a primary school in the north of England. For emerging researchers in the field, discussions about methodology, ethics and analysis of data is meticulously well presented. Parry details at length (see Chapter 5) the rationale for her approach as *participatory, visual and collaborative* with fine consideration given to how the young people (9-10 years old) might present, discuss and interpret their responses. Furthermore, she was eager to work in such a way that she could capture some of how film made young people *feel*, or *act*, rather than just how it made them think, a refreshing riposte to many more rationalist accounts of meaning-making.

The conclusions are rightly cautious, based on a small-scale study. There is no attempt to generalise from the findings but instead to offer the findings for other educators measuring their practice, or seeing the identities children present as possible identities of children they work with in other contexts.

What she does extrapolate from the research is that there are parallels to be drawn between children developing as readers of books and children becoming readers of film. Children used their understanding of children's films as resources for talk and play at home and socially at school and Parry argues that these prior explorations of narrative should have more value in school. There is a major issue tackled here in that the 'disconnect' between home literacy practices and school practices, has a negative impact on many young people's sense of esteem and worth as well as limiting the breadth and depth of their understanding of narrative. Why does all that understanding have to be left at the classroom door?

For Parry, children's films do exciting things for children: they put children at the

centre of narrative, they draw heavily on fantasy and make children the drivers of action. Compared with many school-based explorations of narrative, children's film narratives are full of the joy of a central child character who takes risks, or gets into scrapes or shows bravery, whereas the narratives children are instructed to write in school are safe, neat, ordered and over-structured. In short, children's writing of narrative rarely is allowed to make reference to the wide, rich and detailed narratives encountered in the watching histories of children. Instead writing narratives often gets lost in an imperative to include 'a simile to achieve a certain level of attainment' (208). Ultimately, what Parry argues is that there is a shocking loss of opportunity in cutting off children's social and pleasurable engagements with film texts, and not using them to build a ladder of opportunity as Protherough argues.

In the final chapter, Parry sounds an optimistic bell for the arrival of the BFI 'Film Forever' strategy, one strand of which has given FilmNationUK the contract for drawing up a film education programme with activities and support across the UK, available to all 27,600 schools and to cinemas, youth organisations and community groups. (I would have to challenge that laudable optimism, as such a far-reaching strategy has landed in a period of education policy assault on media education more broadly.)

What is worth getting on board with here – and through reading this book – is the engagement with arguments about attainment and achievement which have led current government policy to work at limiting pupils' access to different narratives. The strength of this book is that Parry argues to draw on the extensive, expanded notion of storytelling children gain from watching films and to make that impact on their conventional literacy learning.

Reviewer – Kate Domaille